

She Treats Contests Like A Job

If you thought winning contests was all chance, think again. Contest entry is serious business to thousands of people in the U.S. and Canada.

Donna Hagen, North Battleford, Sask., was 10 years old when her grandmother introduced her to contests. Since becoming serious about 'contesting' in 1981, her winnings have included cash (\$5,000 twice), cameras, camcorders (5) computers (3), bikes (8), TVs (4) and more. She has traveled free to Europe, Mexico, the Bermudas and the Caribbean. Just a year ago, she won a trip to Toronto for the premiere of a Red Green movie. Her only expense has been postage stamps to submit entry forms.

So what's her secret?

Hagen treats contest entry like a business. She maintains an office in her home where she meticulously files all contest information. She subscribes to a contesting newsletter and has friends all around Canada, with whom she exchanges info on hot new contests.

"Believe It Or Not" Matchstick Models

As a newlywed fresh out of college, Pat Acton couldn't afford the tools he wanted to pursue his passion for woodworking.

"While in high school, I'd learned how to make cabinets but I didn't have the money to buy my own tools," he says.

But he still wanted to do something with wood. So Acton began building with matchsticks. His first project was a small country church that he gave to a neighbor who was a Methodist minister. His next project was a little more involved. "It was a hip-roofed barn that I made for my father for Christmas," he says.

Now, 25 years and 50 models later, Acton is an authority on matchstick construction. He's sold several of his models to Ripley's "Believe it or Not" museums in several U.S. cities and around the world.

"It's become a somewhat lucrative hobby," he says. "I've been able to put together the woodworking shop I always wanted, but it's all devoted to matchsticks."

Acton's latest projects are scale replicas of the U.S. Capitol building and the Notre Dame Cathedral of Chartres, France. The Capitol building, complete with columns and porticos, contains nearly half a million matchsticks. In terms of size and number of matchsticks, it's his biggest undertaking to date. The Chartres Cathedral has about 300,000 matchsticks in it. He figures he's spent 2,000 hours working on the Capitol building.

While there are probably thousands of people who have built with matchsticks, it's doubtful there are any who have become as adept at it as Acton. He's developed techniques that allow him to form columns, curves, and flat sheets that can be cut and finished. He's used the skills he's gained to

"It takes organization and time and lots of stamps," she explains. "The nice thing about contesting is that you can put in as much time as you want. It was nice for me when I was home with my children. It has been a very good hobby, almost a part time job."

Hagen emphasizes the importance of carefully following contest rules. "You don't have to send in a lot of entries," she notes, "but put effort into those you do."

Hagen's friends and relatives are used to saving labels for her, and it pays off for them as well. She will often enter a friend's name in a contest and share her good fortune. They have received TVs, trips, cash and numerous smaller items.

"In the early 90s, a lot of my friends were having babies," she recalls. I entered 15 names of friends in a contest for baby seats and 12 of them won."

Hagen recommends that people interested in entering sweepstakes subscribe to a newsletter for tips on how to win and lists con-



Donna Hagen and son pose with TV star Red Green at the premiere of Green's new movie. They won the trip to Toronto in a contest.

tests to enter. She subscribes to a Canadian regarded contest newsletter in the U.S., newsletter, *Traders Forum*, at \$30 per year *SweepSheet* (www.sweepsheet.com), costs (www.somewhereincanada.com/uf). A highly \$45 per year.

duplicate buildings, ships, birds, Civil War era cannon, airplanes, trains, covered wagons, stagecoaches, eagles with their wings spread, and even a model of the U.S. space shuttle that's 8 ft. tall. His model of the battleship USS Iowa is more than 13 ft. long and has anti-aircraft guns turned on a lathe from a single matchstick.

When he started building with matchsticks, one of Acton's biggest problems was getting rid of the match heads. "I spent hours with a utility knife cutting them off one at a time. I probably cut the heads off of a million matches," he says.

"My wife had been suggesting for years that I contact one of the match makers about buying matchsticks without heads on them. I was afraid they'd think I was some kind of nutcase, but finally I wrote to the Ohio Bluetip Match Company. They wrote back asking how many I wanted and were happy to ship them to me," he says.

Ohio Bluetip was later purchased by Diamond Brands, Cloquet, Minnesota, which now makes nearly all of the wooden matches sold in North America. Acton can now buy as many matchsticks without heads as he wants for about \$50 per 33,000 sticks. And Diamond reports that thanks to him and others like him, they're selling more matchsticks without heads than they are matches. The company also sells craft quality clothespins and popsicle sticks.

While Acton has sold several of his creations, he says he no longer makes them for sale. "I've also made some on commission over the years, but I've found that the motivation isn't the same. I much prefer making something I want to make," he says.

Most of Acton's Matchstick projects will be on display at his home town's new Com-



Acton's first project was a small country church. Recently, he used 300,000 matchsticks to put together this model of the Chartres Cathedral.



Acton also makes trains, ships, birds, airplanes, covered wagons, stagecoaches, and so on.

munity Center when it's completed. While he expects the building to open sometime this spring, Acton notes it's being constructed and finished with mostly volunteer labor, so it's not possible to pinpoint an exact date at this time. He says if you're going to be in the area

and want to see the display, you can call him or send an E-mail to find if it's open. Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Pat Acton, Box 154, Gladbrook, Iowa 50635 (ph 641 473-2230; E-mail: p.acton@mchsi.com).

Make Your Own "Motor Trikes"

While attending a car show a couple years ago, Darrel Hampton saw something he really liked.

"It was a motor trike made on a cut-down car frame with a Chevy 350 V-8 engine," he says. "The only problem was the company wanted \$28,000 for it.

"I had a couple of old Chevy Caprices back home and figured I could probably make my own," says the South Dakota rancher and metal fabricator.

Hampton went to work by stripping the body from a 1983 Caprice Classic that was equipped with a 3.8 L V-6 and 3-speed automatic transmission. Once he was down to the driveline and axles, he cut down the driveline

to about 6 in. long.

He built a motorcycle fork by machining a couple of cold rolled steel shafts to fit inside some heavy-walled tubing with just 0.005 in. clearance. He added zerks to make the fork greasable.

For suspension, he added springs he found at a local IH dealership. "I took the tubes to the dealer and asked him to find some heavy-duty springs that would fit over them. He came up with some coil springs from an IH field cultivator."

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To make his "motor trike", Darrel Hampton stripped the body from a 1983 Caprice Classic, then built his own motorcycle fork.